



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B



Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Jesus Christ with Children*, 1800's



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

To The Heart of Jesus

(By Blessed Miguel Pro, S.J.)

Does our life become from day to day more painful,
more oppressive, more replete with sufferings?

Blessed be He a thousand times who desires it so.

If life be harder, love makes it also stronger,
and only this love, grounded on suffering,
can carry the Cross of my Lord, Jesus Christ.

I believe, O Lord, but strengthen my faith,

Heart of Jesus, I love you, but increase my love.

Heart of Jesus, I trust in you,
but give greater vigor to my confidence.

Heart of Jesus, I give my heart to you,
but so enclose it in you that it may never be
separated from you.

Heart of Jesus, I am all yours,
but take care of my promise so that I may be able
to put it in practice
even unto the complete sacrifice of my life.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy continues the slow movement toward the fulfillment of Jesus' ministry that we will proclaim and manifest in the weeks ahead as the liturgical year winds down.
- ▶ Two significant teachings take place in today's Gospel. Jesus teaches his disciples about his pending death (for the second time in Mark's Gospel) and he teaches his disciples the meaning of servanthood.
- ▶ Today's liturgy is a challenge to Christian communities everywhere to discern if they are living witnesses of Jesus' teaching. We must ask ourselves if all parishioners are equal servants of God in our parish communities.
- ▶ Today's liturgy is an invitation to discern our own individual desires for power and prestige and to strive to serve the marginalized in our communities.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **This reading from the Wisdom tradition tells the story of the way in which the truly *just one* is met with derision and hatred.**
- ▶ The *just one* in this reading bears similar resemblance to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah from last week.
- ▶ He is ridiculed for his righteousness and stands in stark contrast with his arrogant, disobedient, unrighteous and rebellious antagonists.
- ▶ The antagonists in question probably refer to the Jews of Alexandria, apostates from the faith.
- ▶ There is an inherent, but sad and basic truth in this reading.
- ▶ Evil cringes in the face of goodness.
- ▶ Some people not only condemn goodness and criticize it; they also seek to destroy it.
- ▶ The wisdom reading gives us insight into how sinful, rebellious people set out to destroy righteous people.
- ▶ When true goodness exists in a person it calls attention to the lack of goodness of others. It serves as an indictment.
- ▶ Jesus' true goodness stood in stark contrast to deceitful, conniving, hate-filled people.
- ▶ Those who resent such goodness simply point to their own lack of it.
- ▶ The wise sage in this reading exposes the deceitful motives of those who resent and try to destroy the *just one*.
- ▶ The unrighteous antagonists exalt their own worthiness and in so doing mask their own scheming and deception.

- ▶ The wise sage exposes the deceit of these duplicitous charlatans.
- ▶ The sage encourages the righteous to be patient, steadfast and to endure midst their persecution.
- ▶ It is readily obvious why the early Christian community associated the figure of the *just one* with the suffering, passion and death of Christ. Indeed Jesus' goodness stood in abject contrast to the hearts of evil, scheming people intent on furthering their own political interests.
- ▶ This Scripture passage is known as a type—the *just one* is a type for the future Christ.
- ▶ No doubt this passage is chosen to accompany the second passion prediction in Mark's Gospel proclaimed in today's liturgy.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What is there about this reading that captures your imagination?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced the truth inherent in this passage—that evil seeks to destroy goodness?
- ▶ Where is that truth prevalent in our culture, our world, and our families?
- ▶ Why is steadfast endurance an effective response to confront evil?
- ▶ Have you ever met with resistance, persecution, ridicule or criticism for doing the right thing? What does this reading have to say to you in that situation?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about his relationship with us?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about our/my relationship with God?
- ▶ In what way are you able to relate this reading to your own life experience?

Second Reading: James 3:16-4:3

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **The author of James teaches his community the difference between true and false wisdom.**
- ▶ Today's reading is the fourth in a five-week series in which we will hear passages from the Letter of James in the liturgy.
- ▶ As stated last week this letter is known as one of the seven general epistles or "Catholic" letters; they are not written to a specific community. It is a moral exhortation reminiscent of the wisdom books of the Old Testament. There are

- also echoes of Greek Stoicism, a baptismal liturgy and profession of Christian faith.
- ▶ The above influences notwithstanding, the letter is definitively Jewish in origin and was written for Jewish Christians.
 - ▶ While debate abounds, it is widely believed that James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. There is also a possibility that James was a pseudonym, or a ghost-writer and interpreter of James.
 - ▶ The focus of today's second reading is the comparison between true wisdom and false wisdom.
 - ▶ The author personifies the two forms of wisdom.
 - ▶ Leah represents the false and Rachel, the true; the former wisdom is earth-borne and the latter is of divine origin.
 - ▶ James writes about Christian wisdom.
 - ▶ All faith traditions pursue God's wisdom and believe that the wisdom they possess comes to them from God. God gifts them with his wisdom.
 - ▶ Christians are not the only religious body that possesses wisdom. Christians must be open to learn and benefit from the true wisdom, true righteousness and true prayer of others who have learned such wisdom from the mind and heart of God.
 - ▶ James addresses important issues of peace and disunity in the community. Both are borne in the human heart, insists James.
 - ▶ When people live peace-filled, tranquil lives they are a witness that there is another way—the way of non-violence and peace rather than the rush to discord and war.
 - ▶ Wisdom attracts and invites. People are drawn to people who possess wisdom; they emulate it and want it for their own lives.
 - ▶ The early Christian communities struggled with a certain divisive sect within their community referred to as Gnostics. Gnostics believed they alone possessed a special *gnosis*/knowledge that others did not possess. Their arrogant claims were based on false wisdom, not God-given wisdom.
 - ▶ Wisdom is judged by its fruits—those who live compassionate, other-centered, love-filled lives are gifted with true wisdom.
 - ▶ Those who pretend to live such lives, but instead exalt themselves and their special *gnosis* are frauds.
 - ▶ James' catechism concludes with a discourse on the power of prayer.
 - ▶ He reminds his community that prayer is the foundation of the Christian life.
 - ▶ Prayer puts us in touch with the heart and will of God.
 - ▶ Prayer invites deep conversion of heart and intimate communion with God.
 - ▶ Prayer changes hearts, lives and the world.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Is there anyone in your life that you believe possesses wisdom? Explain your answer.
- ▶ What do you believe is the fruit of wisdom?
- ▶ Where is there evidence of wisdom in your own life?
- ▶ Why is wisdom so necessary for the Christian life?
- ▶ In what way are you or your community a living witness of wisdom in your neighborhood or community?
- ▶ Have you ever known anyone who could be described as a hypocrite or fraud as James explains it? Why are such people divisive in the community? How should we respond to such people according to James?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the teaching in this reading?

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ Mark's theology comes full circle in the second part of his Gospel. Three passion predictions are followed by the misinterpretation of the disciples.
- ▶ Mark's Jesus teaches his followers what it means to follow his example.
- ▶ A primary theme in this section is discipleship "on the way". The *way* is the journey of authentic discipleship.
- ▶ Today's disciples are on the way and they completely misinterpret the mission of Jesus—they argue about who is the least and greatest among them.
- ▶ Jesus used the experience of his transfiguration and the predictions of his death as teachable moments for his disciples. He was preparing them for his death and resurrection so they would be able to look back on the events after Jesus' death

and remember Jesus' teaching.

- ▶ The disciples simply could not embrace Jesus' wisdom of the cross and the need for suffering. The mystery of suffering was an alien concept; they simply could not wrap their minds and hearts around the need for it.
- ▶ The Messiah of their imaginations would be arriving as warrior and conqueror; Isaiah's Suffering Servant was not the Messiah for whom they were waiting.
- ▶ The disciples were responding out of worldly wisdom rather than divine wisdom.
- ▶ Jesus' self-revelation elicited fear and confusion.
- ▶ Mark painted an honest portrait of the disciples---a very human portrait. He did not try to gloss over their faults as the other evangelists tried to do.
- ▶ Jesus was talking about his pending death and all they cared about was their position of leadership in the community.
- ▶ Thoughts of personal glory danced in their heads. One can almost hear their arguments of self-aggrandizement. *"A warrior Messiah would no doubt appoint special ambassadors to lead the people. I am more important and worthy than others; Jesus needs me more than he needs the others. I am certainly the logical choice."*
- ▶ The disciples were weary of Jesus' talk of suffering; they wanted action. They wanted to inaugurate this new kingdom once and for all.
- ▶ Denial and competitiveness kept them from understanding what Jesus was trying to teach them.
- ▶ The horror awaiting Jesus in Jerusalem was beyond their comprehension—they did not--could not--hear it. They would rather give in to delusions of personal power and prestige.
- ▶ Jesus used their childish banter as a springboard for his teaching on what it means to be a true servant.
- ▶ It is interesting to note that the word for servant is also interchangeable with the word for children. There is an intentional connection between child and servant in this Gospel pericope.
- ▶ Not only is *servant* and *child* connected so is *receives* and *welcomes*. Taken together they mean care for the ones who cannot care for themselves—those who are in most need of our selfless service.
- ▶ Those weakest members (the child is a symbol for them) belong to Jesus—he is their caretaker.
- ▶ Jesus makes it clear that disciples are to become Christ for those they serve. Christ gives us access to God by his great act of self-sacrificing love.
- ▶ Those who do not know Christ will always find him in the life and faith of true believers.
- ▶ Service, therefore, is synonymous with Divine Presence. To serve is to be imbued with and to imbue the Presence of Christ and his Father.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

FURTHER ELABORATION OF THE GOSPEL

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ Another possible theme emerges in this Gospel—the theme of nonviolence.
- ▶ What does Jesus' journey to Jerusalem really mean? What are the implications of discipleship rooted in the cross of Christ?
- ▶ Such discipleship demands a posture of non-violence in all aspects of the believer's life.
- ▶ The new kingdom Mark envisioned in the Gospel heralded a new egalitarian social order—an order based on the quality of every citizen. Jesus' teaching inaugurated this vision.
- ▶ Jesus taught that the way of non-violence and the way of the cross is the way to respond to oppression. Jesus' way was the way of forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion. Jesus promised that the way of suffering--embracing his paschal sacrifice--is way to participate in his life.
- ▶ Jesus warns them twice of his pending execution. They do not understand.
- ▶ Mark is clear to make the connection between their failure to comprehend the import of what he was telling them and the implications—where that denial will lead them—their betrayal of Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus exposed what really lie behind the disciples' motives—their **lust for power**.
- ▶ Jesus addressed their argument about who was the greatest and who was the least by pointing to a child. Children were the lowest social order in the culture. Not only were they insignificant, no one would have cared what a child thought or paid any attention to them in the first place. The hospitality Jesus insisted was due to them would have been a ridiculous idea. Hospitality was offered to strangers and adults—not to children.
- ▶ Furthermore in a shame based culture those who receive a kindness or hospitality from another individual is expected to publicize it far and wide—thus honoring the giver of said hospitality. Children can hardly reciprocate the kindness extended to them.
- ▶ Jesus challenged their ostentatious power play by shaming them. Jesus told them that if they really wanted to be first, they would be required to reach out to those who could do nothing to reciprocate. They would be required to reach out to them knowing that when they do they will be mocked and ridiculed by their neighbors.
- ▶ Jesus paradoxically shows them that honor can be achieved not in pursuing positions of honor, but in places they could never before have imagined.
- ▶ Jesus taught them to discern within themselves the stirrings of violence in their own hearts evident in their pursuit of power and prestige. Achieving and maintaining such power comes at a great cost and must be defended—often by

- doing violence to those who would take such power and prestige away from us.
- ▶ Those who seek power even in their familial and social groups are no better than the imperial power structures they so condemn.
 - ▶ Jesus used a live parable to illustrate his point. As stated earlier, there was no lower social status than that of children. Childhood was not a carefree time as we today assume it to be. Children were at great risk. Thirty percent of newborn babies died. Disease was rampant and sixty percent of children did not live past their sixteenth birthday.
 - ▶ Society offered no deference to children. Even as late as the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas taught that in a fire the husband must first save his father, then his mother, followed by his wife and lastly the child. During famine children were the last ones fed (a practice still observed in some cultures today).
 - ▶ Children had no rights and no recourse to redress wrongs against them.
 - ▶ The child did not achieve any degree of status until young adulthood at which point they would be considered a freed person—much like their slave counterparts.
 - ▶ Jesus highlighted the plight of a group in society that in essence were not considered persons at all.
 - ▶ By extending honor and thereby exalting the child Jesus was subverting the status quo. Whenever anyone in any society attempts to overthrow a status quo that serves society (even if that status quo oppresses a certain segment of that society) it brings suspicion and attempts to outright squash the subversion—either by discrediting the character[s] of those responsible or by outright violence against them.
 - ▶ Jesus overturned their social apple carts and invited them to envision a kingdom in which role reversal would play a significant part. In the kingdom Jesus came to establish, expected cultural norms would be reversed and elite and lowly would enjoy equal standing in the community.
 - ▶ In spite of the fact of their social standing, parents treasured their children. They represented the hope and future of the family—its permanence. Children represented security for their parents.
 - ▶ Women who could not have children were considered outside the family system.
 - ▶ For Jesus to suggest the absurdity of welcoming the child would have been an outright affront.
 - ▶ Jesus warned the disciples that he would die and rise. They understood death. Resurrection was another matter. What in the world was he trying to say to them?
 - ▶ They also understood betrayal—a common occurrence in first century Palestine. In a shame and honor based culture it was expected that others come to the defense of the betrayed one. However, when all efforts failed, that same betrayed individual was expected to die an honorable death.
 - ▶ Mark presents his catechism on just who Christ was through the casting of Jesus' predictions in chapter eight through ten.
 - ▶ Mark reveals a solid Christology to his readers—they/we understand; sadly the disciples do not.

- ▶ Jesus' miracles were simply a catalyst to bring people to faith. False prophets were calling him a wonder worker and understandably so.
- ▶ Mark redirects the narrative and reminds his readers that it is the cross (not miracles) that brings about the salvation of the world thus ridding it of the eternal effects of sin.
- ▶ By extension Jesus insists that there is only one way to follow him---take up that same cross. The cross will be the way believers will henceforth participate in Christ's life.
- ▶ The cross IS the WAY. Mark invites us to follow that way and cautions us against indulging in distractions, watering down or worse denying the message altogether. Those who were the closest to Jesus simply missed what he was teaching them. Mark instructs us not to miss it.
- ▶ The WAY of Jesus begins with instruction but it always leads to Jerusalem. It did for those first disciples and it does for us.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this statement mean to you: The way is the journey of authentic discipleship?
- ▶ How do you feel about the truth that Mark is teaching his readers that the way of the cross is the way to participate in the life of Christ? What does that mean to you and your life?
- ▶ In what way have you participated in Christ by participating in his cross? What does that mean to you?
- ▶ In what way if any can you relate to the discussion the disciples were having about the least and the greatest? Can you think of any situations (in your life or in the culture) where such attitudes are alive and well today?
- ▶ What is Jesus' response to their dialogue about least and greatest? What are the implications of his parable in action—the way he used children to teach them an important truth?
- ▶ Consider Jesus' teaching about equality in the kingdom, would you say that Christian communities fully live according to that principle? Name some ways that Christian communities treat each person as an equal member of the

- community and explore areas where growth and conversion is needed.
- ▶ Consider this statement: By extending honor and thereby exalting the child Jesus was subverting the status quo. Whenever anyone in any society attempts to overthrow a status quo that serves society (even if that status quo oppresses a certain segment of that society) it brings suspicion and attempts to outright squash the subversion—either by discrediting the character[s] of those responsible or by outright violence against them. Where is there evidence of this principle in modern society? What are the implications for living the WAY of Christ?
 - ▶ Who in our culture share a similar status as the child of first century Palestine? What does Jesus tell us our response should be to such people? What will it cost us?
 - ▶ Do the elite and lowly share equal status in our society/community/neighborhoods? Why is Jesus' word so revolutionary and dangerous to the status quo?
 - ▶ In what way if any, can this story speak to us today?
 - ▶ In what way, if any does this Gospel challenge a behavior or attitude in your life?
 - ▶ In what way does this Gospel invite us to be better disciples?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

THE PRAYER: O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)

*O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- *In what way have you participated in Christ by participating in his cross? What does that mean to you?*

Jesus has spent my entire lifetime trying to teach me the truth of his paschal message—the extent to which I am willing to embrace the cross is the extent to which he will effectively use me to proclaim the Gospel in the world.

There have been many situations in which we as a family have been called upon to embrace the cross. Over the course of my life of faith I have known what it means to be betrayed, and I know what it means to be ridiculed for my faith.

There have been times the sorrow over serious illnesses and near death experiences was so permeating that I thought I would suffocate. In looking back over the years I see a pattern. When the cross comes crashing into my life, I initially reject it. I get angry with God and I start to bargain. I remind him to consider what a good servant I have been (I know he laughs out loud when I do that —“Oh there she goes again!”) and then I look within the situation to see what I am supposed to learn from it.

When I finally come to my senses I offer it up for those who are similarly suffering. Then I go to that deep place within where God lives and where Jesus invites me to fully participate in the life he challenges me to live. My faith grows and intimacy with the Father becomes more palpable when I embrace the cross in my life. One thing is certain: I know the cross is the way of true participation in Jesus' life.

- *Who in our culture share a similar status as the child of first century Palestine? What does Jesus tell us our response should be to such people? What will it cost us?*

I chose to respond to two questions today because I feel very strongly about both questions. Many Christians consider homosexuals to be the lowest on society's scale, regarding them as completely insignificant and on the outside of Christian membership looking in. Some Christian people consider gay people to be among the least of the least—non-persons to many. One Sunday I was very proud of the pastor who was preaching. He challenged the prevailing attitude held by many Christians that homosexuals are damned to hell. He addressed an interview he saw with a very famous televangelist who was asked if homosexuals were saved. The televangelist (who this pastor normally admired) emphatically stated that gays indeed were **not** saved. They were damned by their very orientation.

My pastor reminded the assembly that such an attitude is antithetical to the Gospel. He reminded us that we are not to judge and that the Church does not teach that a homosexual is damned by virtue of his or her orientation. He presented Church teaching that sexual behavior is considered sinful, but homosexual orientation is not sinful. Then he turned to the community and emphatically reminded us, “While gay orientation is not sinful judging the gay person **is** sinful and we will be judged for our judgment.”

One man in my former parish left the Catholic Church because of its liberal teachings regarding homosexuals. He felt the Church did not condemn them enough. He made it his mission in life to denounce them in any way he could. What would Jesus say to this man? “Let he who is without sin...”

Our response according to Jesus in today’s Gospel is to reach out, love and welcome every person into the reign of God. Jesus calls us to be surprised by who he welcomes into his kingdom—imagine how that ancient community felt when he welcomed in tax collectors and prostitutes. Yes, we are to uphold the teaching of the Church, but we are also called to love and to leave the judging up to God.

We are called to carry our cross for those who are oppressed and against public protest respond in love—no matter what cross it brings our way. It is no wonder Jesus was sent to his death. He ate with tax collectors, prostitutes and the unclean of all sorts. He entered their world—loved them, challenged them and told them to go and sin no more—as he tells us. He upset so many status quo apple carts that it is no wonder they sent him to his death.

I have to ask myself: “Self, how many apple carts have you overturned lately?”



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20 | James 3:16-4:3 | Mark 9:30-37

Catholic Social Teaching
Kingdom of God
Sin and Grace
Holy Orders
Church/Ecclesiology

Church Structure
Scripture and Revelation I or II
Liturgical Year
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

While today's Gospel refers to whoever wishes to be first in the reign of God shall be last and servant of God is a commentary on the role of servanthood in the reign of God, one can, however, make the leap to include a commentary on social status in the kingdom. It begs us to ask who is welcome and who is not welcome in our assemblies—who is first and who is last. Is our Church ordered in such a way that we truly believe that the first and the last stand equally at the Lord's banquet table? We sometimes pay lip service to that truth, but our actions reveal a different truth. We cannot self-righteously lay blame at the feet of our hierarchical structure, either. It is a very human tendency to regard later converts to anything as immature, uninformed and less enlightened. Starting at the presumed top, there is no doubt a temptation for cardinals to regard new bishops as lower on the food chain, thus less important. Bishops could be tempted to regard the ministry of clergy as insignificant in comparison to the important work of bishops. Clergy might view the laity as Johnny-come-lately's with an ax to grind and their place to find. Laity in upper level church could be enticed to regard those in parish work as inferior and their work trivial. Those in parish work might be seduced into judging their parishioners as ignorant and uninformed. Active parishioners might be tantalized to dismiss inactive parishioners as inconsequential. Groups within the parish might be charmed into thinking that new groups are a threat to their established stature and tenure. Church-goers might be beguiled into thinking that somehow God loves them more and knows them best. "Like a merry-go-round on a frenzied, unstoppable track, the very human temptation to think we know how God will act, how God should respond and who God should choose, persist ad nauseam on the human continuum." (Mary Birmingham, Word and Worship Workbook, Year A, 515, 516). Catholic social

teaching reminds us that we all stand equal before God—that we all possess the same human dignity. Those who think they should be first will come in last and the lowly will be exalted. It is thus opportune to focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today's Gospel is a continuing catechism on what it means to be a disciple in the reign of God. Those who aspire to greatest are seeking after the wrong thing. Jesus reminds us that if we truly wish to be first in the kingdom we must serve the lowliest among us. We must become servant leaders. It is a new way of living and being in God's world. This is a most fitting liturgy in which to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

SIN AND GRACE

The reading from the Book of Wisdom contrasts the life of a righteous, grace-filled believer with the lawless, ruthless and godless people who cower in the face of righteousness. It is the contrast between the sin we succumb to and the grace, freely given, to which we yield. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SIN AND GRACE.

HOLY ORDERS

Today's Gospel is a continuing catechism on what it means to be a disciple in the reign of God. Those who aspire to be the greatest are seeking after the wrong thing. Jesus reminds us that if we truly wish to be first in the kingdom we must serve the lowliest among us. We must become servant leaders. It is a new way of living and being in God's world. This is the hallmark of the ministerial priesthood. Priests are called to be servant leaders. Thus, it is most that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the HOLY ORDERS.

CHURCH/ECCLESIOLOGY

Today's Gospel is a continuing catechism on what it means to be a disciple in the reign of God. Those who aspire to greatest are seeking after the wrong thing. Jesus reminds us that if we truly wish to be first in the kingdom we must serve the lowliest among us. We must become servant leaders. It is a new way of living and being in God's world. This is an important catechism and sets the stage for the role of the Church, its role and function. This is a most fitting liturgy in which to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

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teaches about the CHURCH STRUCTURE.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus is the revelation of God. Jesus teaches us the mind and heart of God and his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth as we await the kingdom yet to come. Jesus reveals God's plan to us. He reveals God to all believers. Jesus teaches his disciples how to be in relationship with God—we are called to servanthood. Jesus therefore is the revelation of God and we continue to be formed by Jesus' revelation to us in the Sacred Scriptures. That revelation continues in God's revealed, holy word. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.